

# Antidepressants impact deployment status

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Since Sept. 11, 2001 all Americans have been under more stress. Air National Guard members have a unique situation combining stress from civilian and military lives. Medical science knows people are made up of three major components, the physical, the emotional and the spiritual. To cope with stress, one must address all three components.

To take care of the physical involves getting plenty of exercise, rest, and good nutrition. We know by neglecting the physical, we are less able to deal with stress in the other components of emotion and spirit. Spiritual care includes acknowledging that all thinking beings have this component, and then caring for it in whichever manner you feel is best for you, this can include praying, meditating, recreation, contemplating or just relaxing. The emotional dimension can be complex, but there are three basic states of emotion: sad (depressed), neutral and elated (anxious). All people have a mixture of these emotions and when properly balanced a person feels well. When stress is prolonged and extreme, this may overwhelm the persons ability to cope with their world causing either depression or anxiety to take over.

A deployment is inherently stressful; an individual is moved from the "routine" and placed in a situation, which is foreign with many uncontrollable circumstances. If a person is starting the deployment process depressed or anxious, then the added stress may cause one to become worse, this is the reason the Air Force and the National Guard have a policy on the use of psychotropic medications (i.e. antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications). The concern is not for the medications themselves, but for the

guard member's health which could be affected by the deployment.

There are many varied treatments for anxiety and depression. Some treatments include therapy, medications and more invasive therapy. There are a large and rapidly growing number of antidepressant medications that are effective against depression/anxiety. Doctors will often use one, two or even three drugs in combination for the treatment of depression and anxiety. Sometimes for severe or medication refractory depression, invasive therapy may be used and is often curative.

If a guardsman is taking psychotropic medication, it is the underlying condition for which they are taking the medication that will temporarily disqualify them for worldwide duty. In accordance with Air Force Instructions, it is the responsibility of the ANG member to notify the medical squadron whenever he or she begins this type of medication treatment. It should be emphasized a short-term course of therapy (less than a year) is often curative and will result in return to full duties. However, in most cases, during the medication treatment period and a short post evaluation period, the ANG member will be temporarily disqualified from deploying. The bottom line is for most people, clinical depression is minor and relatively short-lived.

Those seeking treatment early will do better and resolve more quickly than if treatment is delayed. Some examples of psychotropic medications include, but are not limited to, Prozac, Zoloft, Paxil, Effexor, Serzone, Wellbutrin, Elavil, Depakote, Neurontin, Zanax, Tranxene and Valium. There are many other types of psychotropic medications, so as always, if there is a question about any medication you are taking please contact the medical squadron.

By no means is it Air National Guard policy to inhibit in any way use of psychotropic medications by ANG personnel. On the contrary, those personnel who require short-term use of these type medications for resolution of short-term reactive depression or anxiety are strongly encouraged to do so. Some members may decide to abruptly cease use of these medications without medical advice and direction. In most cases, this may potentially provoke a rebound acute phase of depression or anxiety, which may exacerbate a normally controllable condition. Please do not alter any course of medication treatment established by your physician without his/her consultation and direction. In some cases where medications are required for long-term treatment, waivers can be granted for worldwide duty on a "case by case" basis. The mission of Air National Guard Medical Services is to ensure ANG personnel are medically fit for duty and deployment...and to retain our most valuable assets in the military service...our people!

## Event Log

18 May 2002  
Clergy Day

14 July 2002  
Family Day

7-11 August 2002  
37th ANG Softball Tournament  
[www.geocities.com/angsoftball02](http://www.geocities.com/angsoftball02)

Your military/179th- related event or program could be put in this space, contact public affairs with information about upcoming events.